

February 22, 2023

Appropriations Sub Committee Public Hearing Elementary and Secondary Education Budget
Testimony on HB 6659, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2025, and Making Appropriations, therefore.

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Victor Lopez Jr., and I am the Executive Director of the Hispanic Coalition of Greater Waterbury and the RIBA Aspira Academy, a Working Cities Challenge initiative of the Boston Federal Reserve. RIBA is an initiative in the south end of Waterbury that seeks to address high unemployment in the neighborhood and lack of quality, affordable childcare. A Data Haven study deemed the south end of Waterbury a “childcare desert” with limited access to childcare programs.

I’m speaking today on behalf of the RIBA Aspira Academy’s Family Child Care Incubator Pilot Planning Committee. Today I would like to highlight the significant role Family Child Care Businesses play in the early childhood system and make the case for investment in Family Child Care Incubators.

The Office of Early Childhood is the state agency charged with ensuring quality, affordable early care and education to Connecticut’s children, birth through school age children. The Legislature has a history of strong support and investment in the early care and education system to ensure working families have safe, enriching environments to nurture children.

The Legislature passed Public Act 21-171 An Act Concerning Issues Relating to the Provision of Early Childhood Education and Services in Connecticut. The bill included the establishment of pilot Family Child Care Incubator businesses in seven cities including: Bridgeport, Danbury, Hartford, New Britain, New Haven, Stamford and Waterbury, cities with low income working families struggling to return to work after the pandemic and unable to find affordable child care.

What is a Family Child Care Business Incubator:

The legislation calls for an innovative approach to expanding family child care businesses by allowing child care businesses to operate in non-residential settings. Family Child Care Incubator businesses not only address the child care crisis but allow entrepreneurs to open their own business. Truly a two-generation model!

The VISION is to open family child care businesses in already established facilities to help launch the family child care businesses.

- The Incubators offer an array of support services including how to start and run a business, classes in early childhood education to obtain certifications for career advancement as well as Family Child Care program certification.

- The Incubators leverage existing state resources including the Office of Early Childhood programs, Women’s Business Development Council, the Child Care Development Fund, DECD small business loans, and other local small business support programs.

The Office of Early Childhood is very supportive of this innovative approach to expanding childcare in Connecticut and extends the full support of their licensing division and other department resources. The pilot cities are mostly in the planning stage, with the exception of New Britain who has identified a site, hired staff and is conducting its first class in how to get a family child care license. New Britain did receive state ARPA dollars to assist in startup costs and this state investment is key to its success.

I am here to ask your support for funding for the Pilot Incubator Projects in the seven cities and require the Office of Early Childhood to include Family Child Care Incubators in existing funding streams, specifically the dollars allocated for “early childcare pilots” and expansion of infant toddler slots. As a new program, Incubators are like an orphan in the early care and education system with no real OEC resources or technical assistance.

RIBA Aspira Academy helps entrepreneurs to obtain their license to open their own Family Childcare Business and to date 19 Hispanic women have obtained their license and started their own business. RIBA is committed to expanding opportunities for low- income people to start their own business and advance their career goals. The legislation is very innovative, but to become a reality it must have a sustainable funding stream. Please support funding for the Family Child Care Pilots included in PA 21-171.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue.

Hispanic Coalition of Greater Waterbury, Inc.	TEAM Inc. Waterbury
Smirna Misionera Church	New Opportunities, Waterbury
Bridge to Success, Waterbury	Waterbury Board of Education
City of Waterbury	School Readiness Council, Waterbury
Neighborhood Housing Services, Inc.	United Way of Greater Waterbury
Greater Waterbury YMCA	Connecticut Community Foundation
Waterbury Youth Services	